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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 GUATEMALA 000144

SIPDIS

FOR DS/IP/OPO AND DS/IP/WHA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ASEC](#)

SUBJECT: FUNDING REQUEST FOR DS - RESIDENTIAL SECURITY

REF: 04 GUATEMALA 2801

¶1. This is an action request to DS for residential security funding in the amount of \$45,000 to locally purchase 85 single B&W camera and single monitor systems to protect our staff in their homes from a serious and increasing crime threat.

¶2. THE PROBLEM - One typical scenario (see others below), too frequently within our approved residential zones, unfolds like this - - On a street in a nice neighborhood of single-family homes, a well-dressed man rings the doorbell of a home typical to the area. At this home surrounded by a tall wall, he tells the occupant that he is there to leave an item for the homeowner, naming him or her, from a known and reputable company. A family or staff member goes to the door and, upon opening a small viewing doorway or partially opening the door, finds that they are confronted with a handgun. Under a valid threat of death, the door is opened completely and the well-dressed man enters. He then opens the garage door, admitting a car full of his confederates, both male and female, who are usually armed with long guns.

¶3. Once in the house, the assailants gather the occupants, rough them up or beat them, perhaps commit sexual assault against females of any age, and tie everyone up. Since they have likely entered into the walled home without being noticed by neighbors (who are behind their own walls), the villains are at liberty to explore, abuse, rob and ravage at will. Two horrifying hours or so after it all began, the robbers simply open the garage door and, using their own vehicle and perhaps the homeowner's car, quietly drive off with the occupants, most valued possessions.

¶4. The victims eventually untie themselves and assess the damages. The panic is over, temporarily. The victims often decide not to report the crime to the local police or prosecutor. While the criminals took their time ransacking the home and threatening the occupants, they also made a point of identifying each person, using their now-stolen IDs. The threats were not veiled - - &Call the police and we will return. We know who you are, where you live, we have pictures of your kids and know where they go to school. We will kill you.<sup>8</sup> The victims also know that active duty police officers are at times involved, or at least complicit, in these crimes. (NOTE: There have been shoot-outs between on-duty police and off-duty police committing these kinds of crimes. The inability of the police, prosecutorial system and judicial system to investigate and resolve such crimes has been well documented in other Embassy reporting.) The victims, fearing for their own safety, decide not to report the crimes. Frequently, some time after the robbery, the victim will receive a call from one of the culprits to remind them that those who invaded the home have not forgotten.

¶5. HOW DO WE KNOW? Although the victims do not make reports to the police, they do want to talk. Several local NGOs focus on crime in Guatemala and collect some data. Others, including many AmCit residents, report assaults to the Embassy. Often, these crimes are reported via neighborhood grapevines. None of these channels provide reliable statistics, but they leave no doubt that these robberies are occurring.

¶6. OTHER SCENARIOS ) The well-armed and organized criminal gangs who roam the streets looking for residential targets of opportunity do not limit themselves to the scenario above. Variations include catching a victim as they arrive at or depart from the property and, under threat of death, force them to take the robbers inside where the scenario above then unfolds. Cutting the grass or pruning the shrubbery outside of the home's security wall is risky business. Order a pizza? Better make sure that the pizza man is not being held at gunpoint before opening the door. Going to visit friends? Hope that they are not being robbed. Culprits have intercepted visitors to one home, split the family (holding some hostage) and forced one family member at gunpoint back to their own home to conduct a robbery there. Worse yet are groups, with active duty police officers involved or at least with people dressed as police, coming to the home, ringing the bell and stating they have a warrant to be served. &Open the door or we will break it down! You are going to jail (not pleasant given the local jail conditions) if you don't open this door!<sup>8</sup> Fixed guard? This is a risk worth

its own paragraph.

**17. FIXED GUARDS** ) The Wrong Response to the Criminal Methodology. The guard business in Guatemala averages over 100% turnover yearly, making management, training and the development of loyalty difficult. A bored, minimum wage and poorly educated guard, regardless of instructions, will open the door and talk to a neighboring guard or the cute maid across the street, or just look around. The organized criminal element looks for any opportunity to access the home, and a guard, armed or not, opening a door is a great opportunity. The guard simply becomes another victim and the criminals now have another weapon. The residential area of La Canada in Zone 14 is generally thought to be the safest gated community of our approved residential zones. La Canada includes homes of many diplomatic personnel, numerous foreign missions and the residences of wealthy business people. But, this has not stopped the crimes there. Shoot-outs have happened, drug smugglers have been busted, pedestrians have been robbed and home invasions have occurred. Recently, a group of people, well armed and dressed like police, disarmed a fixed-post guard and entered a home of an AmCit to rob and ransack it. Luckily, the homeowners were not at home.

**18. PROBING** ) It is hard to determine the amount of probing when we live in a country where doorbell ringing is done to find work, ask for handouts, sell fruit or provide knife sharpening service. But, we do believe there is a substantial amount of criminal probing. Recently, a Mission employee in La Canada reported the arrival of an &alarm company<sup>8</sup> that claimed to need to check the system and change the code. The occupant refused to come to the door and the person outside began asking questions like &Which embassy does this house belong to?<sup>8</sup> This is typical of the sort of event our mobile patrols respond to quickly. They seek to identify the person involved, although even those with criminal intent may appear legitimate.

**19. OUR CURRENT PRECAUTIONS** ) RSO averages one residential security notice to all staff, in one form or another, every 60 days. These usually entail reminders about good residential security procedures and updates on new criminal tactics. Post conducts yearly refresher briefings during our annual cascade system meetings that involve all official staff. RSO and residential security is the most prominent topic at official AmCit town hall meetings. Twice annually, RSO provides a security training course in Spanish that is open to all household staff, drivers, gardeners and anyone else who might occupy our official AmCit's residences. Participation is always high. RSO staff, with complete Post Management support, tightly enforces our ResSec program. Rarely is there any resistance to our requirements, and contractors have learned that we have exacting standards. Post and RSO have made a point that incoming staff should strongly consider apartment life given the crime risks and have offered assistance to current staff members who want to switch to an apartment for security reasons. (NOTE: Guatemala is an LQA post, so staff members find their own housing. In our earthquake-prone environment, we also limit the number of staff in any single apartment building or neighborhood.) Our ResSec staff responds immediately to all issues or concerns about any element of the program. Our mobile patrol service, utilizing a group of police dedicated to the Embassy (and trained by RSO over years), is an integral part of the protection provided to our staff and they repeatedly respond well to issues they find on patrol or are called to address. We have also used the Surveillance Detection team at times to supplement our other security measures in residential areas, given the critical risk our staff face here.

**10. GUARD COSTS** - A fixed-post guard at today's contract rate costs \$10,587 yearly for a 24-hour position, plus the costs associated with the guard's supervision and outfitting a reasonable guard post. A 12-hour guard at nighttime will not protect family members when they are most at risk. On average, Post housing includes 80 single-family homes (many employees at this post have families with young children who are at home much of the day). At the listed rates, it would cost at least \$845,000 yearly to provide fixed-post guards at each of these single-family homes. Even at that high cost, these guards will not provide an effective deterrent to the kind of crime we confront. For these reasons, we propose applying a DS facility guideline to our residential issues: the utilization of reliable and less expensive technical means to replace manned positions whenever possible.

**11. PROPOSAL** ) Residential security begins at the perimeter wall, not once criminals are already on the property. The EAC at our critical-threat crime post has discussed this proposal on several occasions. We agree that the most effective, cost-sensible, reasonable and prudent method to increase our personnel's safety is to give them the ability to see outside the wall before opening the door. Because of the layout of most of our homes, the only practical way to accomplish this is to mount a camera outside of the wall and

place a monitor inside the home near the interior door. A CCTV system would give the occupant critical information about what is going on outside of the gate without the risks of having a minimum wage, often disinterested, fixed guard make decisions that impact the occupant. (NOTE: Airphone-type systems are not practical due to their limited field of view.) Modern, simple CCTV systems are inexpensive and reasonably reliable. Post can manage the installation and maintenance using current RSO ResSec staff, with the support of GSO personnel. Post desires DS funding to locally purchase 85 single B&W camera systems, with single monitors, to be installed on each single-family home occupied by official staff. The entire RSO is in full agreement with this proposal.

**112. ACTION REQUEST** ) Post requests DS funding in the amount of \$45,000 to locally purchase eighty-five (85) single B&W camera systems, with single monitors, including all required cabling, power sources and mounting brackets.

**113. COST FOR INACTION** ) We are doing everything we can to manage the serious risks of serving the USG at this critical-threat crime post and appreciate the Department and DS's continued support. The total cost of cameras and monitors is nothing compared to the cost of the potential human tragedy, lost productivity, demoralization, investigative measures and recovery should one of our staff or a family member find themselves in their own invaded home, beaten, robbed or worse.

HAMILTON